**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ **Period:** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**What caused the fall of the Western Roman Empire?**

**Causes of the fall of the Roman Empire**

In the third century AD Rome faced many problems. In addition to internal

decay, the invasion by the Germanic tribes seemed to sound the death knellfor the Western Roman Empire. Historians have examined both the internalconditions that weakened the expansive empire and the external force of thebarbarian invasions and have presented a variety of explanations for the fallof the Western Roman Empire.

**Document 1**

This excerpt is from a textbook, *The Course of Civilization* by Strayer,

Gatzke&Harbison (1961)

The basic trouble was that very few inhabitants of the empire believed that

the old civilization was worth saving … the overwhelming majority of the

population had been systematically excluded from political responsibilities.

They could not organize to protect themselves; they could not serve in the

army . . . Their economic plight was hopeless. Most of them were serfs

bound to the soil, and the small urban groups saw their cities slipping into

uninterrupted decline.

**1. What were the basic problems facing the Western Roman Empire according to the authors?**

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**Document 2**

Excerpt from *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* by Edward

Gibbon.

The decline of Rome was the natural and inevitable effect of immoderate

greatness (large size)…The introduction … of Christianity, had some

influence on the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. The clergysuccessfully preached the doctrine of patience; the active virtues of societywere discouraged; and the last remains of military spirit were buried in thecloister; a large portion of public & private wealth was consecrated to the…demands of charity and devotion …

**2. According to the excerpt from Gibbon, what were two causes for thefall of Rome? Explain both.**

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**Document 3**

This excerpt is from *Uses of the Past* by Herbert J. Muller.

First the economic factor …While the empire was expanding, its prosperity

was fed by plundered wealth and by new markets in the semibarbaric

provinces. When the empire ceased to expand, however, economic progresssoon ceased…. The abundance of slaves led to growth of the *latifundia,* thegreat estates that … came to dominate agriculture and ruin the free *coloni*(farmers) who drifted to the cities, to add to the unemployment there. Theabundance of slaves kept wages low.

**3a. What economic issues does Muller identify as causes for decline? Explain.**

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**3b. How was slavery a cause for the decline of the Roman Empire?**

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**Document 4**

This excerpt, from *The New deal in Old Rome* by Henry Haskell, blames thedecline on the heavy taxation required to support the government expenses.

…Part of the money went into … the maintenance of the army and of the

vast bureaucracy required by a centralized government…the expense led tostrangling taxation… The heart was taken out of enterprising men…tenants fled from their farms and businessmen and workmen from their occupations.

Private enterprise was crushed & the state was forced to take over many

kinds of businesses to keep the machine running. People learned to expect

something for nothing. The old Roman virtues of self-reliance & initiative

were lost in that part of the population on relief (welfare)…The central

government undertook such far-reaching responsibility in affairs that the

fiber of the citizens weakened.

**4a. Why did the Roman government have large expenses?**

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**4b. What was the effect of high taxation on the people?**

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**4c. What effect did the establishment of a government welfare system have on the people?**

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**Document 5**

This excerpt, from *Romans without Laurels* by Indro Montanelli, blames

the fall on “internal decay,” specifically that of the military.

Rome, like all great empires, was not overthrown by external enemies but

undermined by internal decay. . . .The military crisis was the result of

…proud old aristocracy’s…shortage of children. (Consequently)

foreigners poured into the…Roman army [was] composed entirely of

Germans

**5. What does this author identify as the cause of problems in the military?**

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**Document 6**

This map shows the barbarian invasions of the Roman Empire prior to 476.

**6a. According to the map above, what was the cause of the fall of the Roman Empire?**

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**6b. Was this a unified attack?**

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**Task: What caused the fall of the Western Roman Empire?**

List causes for each of the categories on the left using the documents and

your studies of Ancient Rome Political – Social, Political, Economic, and

Military.

***Remember*** *to do well on the Regents you must note outside information in your essay*

**Example:** What caused the fall of the Roman Empire?

**Cause:** Citizens were apathetic (did not care), serfs in debt bondage –

farming in decline

Cities were in hopeless decline. (doc. 1)

**Effect:** Lack of pride and effort led to a feeling of hopelessness in the

empire. This led to a slow and steady decay.